



## ***Kubla Khan* – Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

### **One**

#### **Introduction**

One of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's most famous poems is *Kubla Khan* and this is introduced to readers with the mysterious line

*Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.*

This prompts two immediate questions:

- Why isn't it just a dream?
- Why is it a 'fragment'?

The story goes that having taken some powerful medicine and fallen asleep, Coleridge had equally powerful dreams which included visions of a strange and exotic world.

He was suddenly woken from this and a little later wrote down as much as he could remember of his visions, these becoming the 'fragment' [a long one!] which is his poem *Kubla Khan*.

#### **Exploring**

Reading and exploring this poem on your own or with others isn't about analysing it or trying to find a meaning. Like the poem itself, this can be a journey through and visualising the amazing details Coleridge creates and writes about.

What is it that makes these so imaginative?

Read the poem or listen to a reading of the poem. If time, do this at least twice.

## ***Vision Map First Step***

You will need a large copy of the poem to draw and write on – poster size, so putting an A4 copy on this would do nicely.

Next, circle all those references – individual details, words, whole lines – that you don't understand or want to find out more about.

Write questions you want answered next to your selections. These can spread from the poem copy onto the poster sheet.

For example, from the first stanza you might be circling and asking questions like the following:

- What is 'Xanadu'?
- Who is 'Kubla Khan'?
- Is a river really called 'Alph'? Why is it sacred?
- How can caverns be 'measureless to man'?
- What does 'girdled round' mean?
- Are there real trees that are 'incense-bearing'?

Work through the whole poem. There's no rush! Keep asking questions.

## ***Vision Map Second Step***

Yes, finding answers.

These can be real – but they don't have to be...

- With 'Xanadu' and 'Kubla Khan' you will find the former is a real place and Kublai Khan did build a summer palace there. The poem itself tells us much about what 'Xanadu' is, even creatively.
- But 'our' Kubla Khan – is she an explorer? How did she get to Xanadu? Why did she go there? In the poem, is she imagining herself as a 'damsel with a dulcimer'? Why?
- Why are caverns 'measureless to man'? Who tried measuring them? When? What happened?
- If there are 'incense-bearing trees' could there also be 'incense-burning' trees...?



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### **Two**

#### ***Vision Writing***

As it is National Poetry Day, writing a poem would be a good choice, but any kind of writing inspired by all of the questions and answers you have should hopefully be enjoyable.

With your details, there is a story to be told. Poetry, like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, is a great way to tell a story.

One of the many brilliant ideas in Coleridge's poem is that it is a *fragment*. It isn't, therefore, a story with an ending. It isn't a story with a particular message.

It is a story about a journey, a journey of the imagination and a detailing of these visions of what has been seen and heard and felt.

Have some fun telling yours.

#### ***Vision Poem***

Your poem can be written using a 'stream of consciousness' approach.

Have a good re-read of your poster, produced individually or with others, and note/pick out details you like most. It would be a good idea to make personal notes of these, like a list of ideas.

Think about these for a while, and simply start writing. Don't stop. Don't stop at all. Keep writing. If you feel blank, keep writing, whatever comes into your thoughts until you pick up a thread from your notes. You can look at your list while writing – it isn't a test!

You can shape this into a poem later. The following is one idea of how to shape your 'stream of consciousness' writing.

### ***Vision List Poem***

With your original notes and your 'stream of consciousness' writing you will hopefully have plenty of detail to shape into a poem.

A list poem is a simple structure that allows you to place details and descriptions of these one after the other.

Use repetition if this helps, especially if this gives you a pattern to follow. Copy Coleridge's storyline – he would be thrilled!

You can always edit this when finished.

### ***Vision List Poem Example***

*I have travelled to Kubla Khan  
where the sky is a dome of purple and blue  
where rainbow rivers flow forward forever  
where horizons shift to the dancing move of hills  
where caverns are measured by disappeared men*

*I have travelled to Kubla Khan  
where cave floors are shaped like dulcimers  
where streams pass over to caress into sound  
where walls spiral round and round  
where gardens of incense-burning trees ignite*

and so on.

Go with it. Go on the journey of your writing. This is your Vision.